The Trend of Using English in Bangladeshi Social and Electronic Media Conversations: Reasons 'Within' and 'Beyond' the Circle

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Abstract— Language is one of the strong driving forces in shaping the identity and culture of people of a community, therefore, issues related to language is always dealt with tact and imminence. One of the noteworthy traits of language is change and progressiveness, which is prevalent in Bangla (native language or L1 of Bangladesh) language as well. These changing trends of language include code switching/mixing tendency (Bangla, English or Hindi), violation of standard form of Bangla, transliteration of Bangla into English, use of English accent in pronouncing Bangla, deliberate attempt of young generation to use English as a fashion statement etc. This paper intends to explore the existing realities behind this linguistic changes and the impact of this changes on Bangla. To do so, examples of a few conversations from private radio & Television channels and face book pages have been provided and analyzed to give a glimpse of the current linguistic situation of Bangladesh that is evident in Bangladeshi electronic and social media conversations at present. This paper tries to illustrate the importance of a nation-wide language awareness that can make a difference in policy and practice of using language in Bangladesh emphasizing literature, culture and functions of both native (Bangla) and foreign (English) language.

Index Terms— **Linguistic Situation, Language Awareness, Social and Electronic Media, Context of Bangladesh.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is not only a medium of communication; it also reflects the identity, ideology and culture of a community. As Hasan (2009, p. 43) noted: 'language shapes and develops a culture'. In recent decades, the concepts of linguistic imperialism and hegemony have become a matter of concern in many countries, including Bangladesh. With its background of European colonial suppression and the history of its native language movement, Bangladesh has the fervour of language patriotism. However, people are concerned that 'incompetency in [the] English language may result in keeping them lagged behind in taking economic advantages from the momentum generated by globalization, of which English is arguably a major driving force' (Chowdhury &Kabir, 2014, p. 2). All these factors involuntarily are in motion while language issues are to be counted in the context of Bangladesh.

In the monolingual country of Bangladesh, the teaching

and learning English has created a curious linguistic situation that has given English an unusual position within the country's native language. Bangla is the native language of Bangladesh. Bangladeshis from all spheres of life use Bangla in their day-to-day lives. It is not necessary for Bangladeshis to use English except for academic and professional purposes. However, code switching, code mixing and the use of a deviated form of standard Bangla or English have become common linguistic features in the regular speech of Bangladeshis. This form of communication is not limited to day-to-day communications; (consciously or unconsciously) it has also extended to social and electronic media.

In a bilingual society of bilingual speakers, code switching and code mixing may be natural phenomena; however, in Bangladesh, native Bangladeshi speakers are not bilingual. This paper sought to bring to light the key factors affecting the attitudes of educated and uneducated people in Bangladesh so that the government can change the mobility of the linguistics situation. A number of factors must be considered in relation to the language challenges facing Bangladesh, including a lack of proper language planning and policies, a lack of appropriate education policies, no laws on media language, an absence of initiatives and encouragement to study native literature and the very limited scope for comparative or translation studies. This paper focuses on the importance of language awareness and the need to ensure the national and cultural identity of Bangladesh by implementing proper policies of linguistic purism and linguistic liberalism in relation to first and foreign languages.

This study conducted qualitative research. Specifically, several documents were analysed, including different posts to a social networking website, a conversation between radio jockeys and transcripts of interviews that had been telecast on Bangladeshi television channels. This paper tries to show the reasons for raising awareness regarding the role and use of native and foreign languages among the Bangladeshis analysing the current linguistic situation.Furthermore, it has shed light upon some possible pathways to maintain their Bengali culture and identity through their linguistic individuality, to cope with the challenges of language hegemony of current global communicative era. Linguists, educators, writers and policy makers should come forward to contribute to the fields of language planning and policy, comparative studies and translation studies. Further, contributions to the native literature should also seek to raise language awareness.

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II. POSITIONING ENGLISH IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH

According to the Part 1, Article 3 of Bangladesh's Constitution, 'the state language of the republic is Bangla'. Further, the Bangla procholon Ain 1987 (i.e., the Bangla Implementation Act) stated that Bangla was the official national language of Bangladesh and English was declared as lingua franca to be used in communications with foreign countries. The practical use English complies with this remark. As Ali (2013) stated:

- Though officially English is not recognized by the government as a second language, English does serve as a second language for the people pursuing higher education and social status. Even as a foreign language, English takes on a special importance in the national educational policy.

The accuracy of this statement can be determined by analysing the role of English in Bangladesh. First, in relation to both policies and practices, English is used extensively at all education levels. Under the government's policy, English is compulsory subject up to the secondary level of education. The recognition of the importance of teaching and learning English is also evident in Bangladesh's 2010 education policy under which English was made a compulsory subject in primary school education, secondary school education and at all colleges and universities.

English is recognised as essential tool for building a knowledge-based society. The 2010 Education policy (as cited in Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014, p.10) requires:

- An emphasis on English writing and speaking from the very beginning of primary education;
- That English, as medium of instruction, be introduced from the secondary level;
- That an adequate number of English teachers be appointed at the secondary level; and
- That English (along with Bengali) be the mediums of instruction at the tertiary level.

The people of Bangladesh have accepted all the initiatives and efforts undertaken by the government. This attitude shows that the people of Bangladesh view learning English as one of the most important parts of their education. However, the proficiency level of common Bangladeshis is not adequate. This suggests a lack of proper teaching and learning methods in foreign language learning. As Hasan (2014) stated:

The way English is taught at academic settings in our country makes us struggling communicators. Neither do we use English for a meaningful purpose in our daily lives nor do we have a social or academic system, which demands that we speak English practically. The scenario is sad and endemic, as a matter of fact.

This problem has given rise to three education systems based on the medium of instruction Bangla, English and Madrasa. Bangla medium schools (both government and private) mainly follow the government's education policy in secondary or higher secondary schools. English medium schools are under the supervision of the British Council and all subjects at these schools are taught in English except Bangla; however, it should be noted that the subject of Bangla is give little importance in secondary and higher secondary English medium schools. In Madrasa schools, the medium of instruction is Arabic or Urdu; however, the teaching of Bangla and English is not neglected. Finally, at the tertiary level, all private universities adopt English as the medium of instruction and all public universities allow students to use both Bangla and English in their examinations. Thus, there is coordinated regulatory system for teaching English under Bangladesh's education policy.

Second, people with English language skills are given the highest priority in education, job sectors, science and technological development and global communication. English is used extensively in the High Court and Supreme Court; however, the lower courts perform all their activities in Bangla. People with a sound knowledge of English can easily access both the public and private job sectors. Electronic media also uses English in different programs. This reality is not imposed, but accepted by Bangladeshi people whether consciously or unconsciously. The use of English in all of these streams exhibits the dominant power that English has in Bangladesh. In one study, Erling et al. (2012) considered the preconceived notions that people hold in relation to English and noted:

Knowledge of English was associated with education in general, and often a good education, with higher level professions, and with providing a service to the community. For those reasons, many of the participants wish that they had better skills in English and they make every effort to see that their children have opportunities to learn the language. In some cases, knowledge of English was unrealistically perceived as a general panacea that can make people's lives better by enhancing their livelihood and standing in the community.

Thus, English is deemed as a sign of social status and prestige. Further, acquiring and practicing English is a sign of sophistication. An individual who can fluently speak English is well respected by other people. Additionally, using English in day-to-day conversations has become trendy and fashionable among young people. However, the use of English is having a number of effects on the native language of Bangladesh. The next section of this paper discusses a number of linguistic situations that are being affected by English.

III. THE USE OF ENGLISH IN MEDIA CONVERSATIONS ANS THE POSSIBLE REASONS FOR ITS USE

Code switching, code mixing and code borrowing, using transliterations or pronouncing Bangla in an English accent are common linguistic phenomena now present in the speech of native Bangla speakers. English has appeared in the day-to-day conversations of educated individuals and among individuals with little academic education. According to Banu and Sussex (2001): 'As the use of English is increasing day by day in different forms, there is significant evidence of use of English along with Bangla as code-mixing and

code-switching'. This trend is present in the speaking patters of the younger generation. Notably, they use English in two ways: (i) by infusing English words and affixes into the Bangla language; and (ii) by switching from a Bangla sentence to an English sentence. This linguistic characteristic is also very common in television and radio conversations. Mass media represents the social, political and economical culture of a country through the medium of language. Today, individuals of all ages are connected to virtual electronic media. Unfortunately, the distortion of standard Bangla and the unlimited use of code mixing and code switching are common phenomena in Bangladeshi radio and television programmes.

Below, a number of examples of code mixing, code switching, deviations from the standard form of Bangla and transliteration are provided. The possible reasons behind these phenomena are also discussed. The first example is an interview that was telecast on a private news channel. The second example is conversation between two radio jockeys that was telecast on a private radio channel. The third example is a screenshot of an individual's Facebook status (presented in this paper with the permission of the author of the post).

Pattern 1

Qsn:আপনারকোটিকোটিfan, online এওআপনারকোটিকোটিfan, বিভিন্নরকমেরমন্তব্যব্যাবক্তব্যআসে , কিভাবেhandleকরেনসেটা? (You have unlimited fans, even online fans, they make different comments, how do you handle all these?)

Reply: Recentlyআমিfacebookএততটাactiveনা .যেহেতুআমার fan page অনেকমানুষ, মানুষধারনাকরেআমিfacebookএঅনেকactive … আমরাpositivityকেখুবএকটাshareকরিনা….আমরাকিন্তুপ্রতিনিয়ত এগুলোfaceকরেআসছি … কিন্তুআসলেসবারagainstএওরাইকিন্তুমুখ খুললএটাdisproportion atelyএকটাবড়আকারধারণকরেছে … আমরাpublic figureরাকিন্তুএসবেused to. (Recently, I have not been that active on Facebook. As there are so many people on my fan page, people believe that I am very active on Facebook. … We do not share positivity that much. … but we are facing this issue regularly. … they spoke up against them. … but disproportionately, it has turned into a big issue. … We public figures are almost used to it).

Qsn: Bangladesh এর online scenarioসম্পর্কেআপনারব্যক্তিগতমতদেন (Give your personal opinion of the online scenario in Bangladesh).

Reply:মানুষযখনকাউকেনিয়ে troll করছেবাhate speechদিচ্ছেআমারমনেহয়একমাত্রsolutionহচ্ছেএটাকেignoreকরা … ওগুলোরদিকেআমিযদিconcentrateদেয়াশুরুকরিআমিভালকাজগুলো করবকেমনকরে? … আমাদের Bangladesh online এখনএইmindsetএটাদরকার … আমাদেরযারাhate speechদিচ্ছেবা troll করছেতারাকরুকনা … আমিতোenjoy করিএটাতেreactওকরিনাআমিenjoy kori … At the end of the dayআমিsureযেআমরাএগুলোখেকেমোটিভেতদহতেপারব। (When

people are trolling or engaging in hate speech, I think the only solution is to ignore it….How could I carry on my work if I concentrated on those? This mind set is essential given the Bangladesh online situation … Those engaging in hate speech or trolling, let them do it. … I myself enjoy it/ … I even donot react to it, I enjoy it. … At the end of the day I am sure we can be motivated by these people)

Pattern 2

RJ1: একটাদেখছিএকটাeventদেখছিনামহচ্ছেbasic stand of comedy workshop.

RJ 2: Ok, Are you hosting?

RJ 1: নানামানেguess the thing I wanted to know who would go to a basic workshopমানেIf I want to go , I would go to an exclusive workshop মানে they wanted to say that standard comedyরbasic skillহয়তোবাশিখথাযায় … ওরালিখছেbasic comedy workshop.

RJ2: মানেlevel 1, 101 workshop.

Rj 1:ওরালিখছেbasic comedy workshop.

RJ2: negative wordহয়েগেছে.

RJ1: I don't want to go to a basic stand-up comedy.

It should be noted that in these conversations, the hosts, participants and radio jockeys all use English in their speech. First, this shows that there is no policy or rule that the media must follow in relation to language use. Second, the participants in the first interview are public figures (that can be known from their own dialogues); they represent an educated and powerful section of society and use English words in their speech. This indicates that either they are not conscious or they are reluctant to this code switching or code mixing tendency. As these individuals are role models, many people have copied the manner in which they talk. The radio jockeys hosting the radio programme frequently use both Bangla and English in their speech. Hossain (2013) stated: 'the RJs (Radio Jockeys) use a language which is a mixture of Bangla and English and it is better be called BANGLISH'. The English language itself has power and cultural capital (e.g., it represents academic credentials or qualification/a standard accent) and is a sign of social prestige.

Pattern 3

Transliteration (i.e., the conversion of a text from one script to another) is another way in which English is being used in place of Bangla. The younger generation often uses social networking websites to communicate with each other. In many cases, it can be observed that they use transliteration rather than monolingualism (see Figure 1 for an example).

Figure 1: Facebook conversation

In Figure 1, while both users are giving their status and commenting in Bangla, they are using the English alphabet. This is an example of transliteration. A number of software programs offer the option of writing in Bangla on social networking websites; however very few individuals use these software programs. This is another indication of people's apathy towards writing or using Bangla.

These examples offer only a glimpse of the present linguistic situation in Bangladesh that has arisen not due to the competency of Bangladeshis in English, but due to the positive attitudes of Bangladeshis towards English and their apathy towards Bangla.

IV. THE IMPORTANCEOF RAISING LINGUISTIC AWARENESSIN BANGLADESH:POSSIBLE PATHWAYS

Language is not static, it changes its direction according to the functions needed in the speech community members. However, individuals should make a conscious decision as to which direction they wish to lead their language. The few examples provided in this paper represent a meagre attempt to bring to light the real linguistic situation in Bangladesh. The people of Bangladesh (both educated and uneducated) should attempt to address this linguistic situation. The concept of language awareness is favoured in second or foreign language acquisition. Language awareness refers to learners' 'consciousness and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language' (Carter, 2003). Being aware of the culture of a target language should make second language and FL learners feel more successful and competent when learning a language. It is unfortunate that there are no awareness initiatives regarding use of language at the national level or institutional level in Bangladesh.

Noguerol (cited in Masats, 2001) noted, it is important that children experience diversity as a phenomenon that shapes their identities, as they are individuals who speak a given language or who belong to a particular culture that, in either case, was shaped by the contributions of many people from distinct origins. Language awareness involves learners reflecting and discovering the metalinguistic processes of the target language and native language. Bangladeshis have a close emotional attachment to their language and culture; thus, a conscious awareness relating to the pragmatic use of Bangla and English language might be possible to place in the individual and national sphere in a constructive way. Therefore, a language awareness approach could help to properly guide and direct Bangladesh's linguistic challenges.

Linguistic indecisiveness creates an incompetent linguistic ability in both native and foreign language learners. Siraji, (2008, p. 34, as cited in Hasan & Rahman, 2012) argued that 'without developing and enriching one's own mother tongue [i.e., Bangla], it is a folly to expect national developments'. Given that language and culture are interrelated, an overall cultural awareness could revive linguistic awareness. According to Wardhaugh (1986), one longstanding claim concerning the relationship between language and culture is that "the structure of a language determines the way in which the speakers of that language view the world'. Bangladesh has an age-old heritage and rich culture that was in most cases crafted by its language. However, a few effective steps need be taken to create language awareness and solve the quandary of the present linguistic situation in Bangladesh.

First, language planning and policy is required in Bangladesh, as planning and policy could foster equity in the socio-linguistic arena while also maintaining language diversity. Bangla as a language is not on the verge of language extinction or endangerment; nonetheless, the present linguistic situation in Bangladesh necessitates language planning and policy in relation to both native and foreign languages. The government could officially enshrine language policies in legislation. Further, court decisions and policies could determine how languages are used. Cultivated language skills are needed to meet national priorities and establish the rights of individuals or groups to use and maintain languages. As Kaplan and Baldauf Jr (1997) stated: 'Language planning is a deliberate effort to influence the function, structure, or acquisition of languagesor language varietywithin a speech community'.

Bangladesh has no explicit language policy in relation to native or foreign languages; however, there is a mechanism that works in a form of status planning. Promito Bangla (i.e., standard Bangla) is used as the medium of instruction in education. However, there is no explicit body that plans or determines the structure or function of language (corpus planning) in Bangladesh. A living language changes overtime; Bangla (first language, L1,of Bangladesh) is also changing; but there is hardly any attempts to modernize that language. In Bangladesh, the existing implicit language policy is working as an acquisition policy. The current needs and interest in relation to the usage of English have allowed English to be the medium of instruction in the certain education sector; however, Bangla is widely used officially accepted as the medium of instruction in the core of education sector. To address this issue, a bilingual approach could be adopted; however, this approach should be developed under a

proper language plan and policy. As Bamgbose (2003, p. 9) rightly pointed out:

Language policy discourse in relation to English has implications for language planning, particularly with regard to extending its scope beyond language, and ensuring that it is inclusive, equitable, and ultimately designed to promote the overall cultural and economic development of a country. The hegemony of English is a reality that language policy and planning should take account of.

More research is needed to ensure that the best language policy is adopted and the best plan implemented at the national level in Bangladesh. This research should include linguists, policy makers and academicians from the education and administration sectors. Policy makers should be aware of all of the important issues and implement proper language planning and policies.

Second, to ensure cohesive socio-economic and socio-cultural development, English should occupy a complementary position alongside Bangla rather than a substitute or replacement. A few educators and linguists in their respective arenas are trying to shed light upon the present nonchalant linguistic situation; however, their work has had very little impact on the overall undermining role and usage of Bangla and English in Bangladesh. In relation to learning English and the need to keep up-to-date with the technologically advanced-world, the common people acknowledge the need to learn English. The education policy emphasises teaching and learning English; but there is no such emphasis on teaching and learning Bangla (L1). Thus far, very few efforts and initiatives have sought to study the native language and people are not aware of the present linguistic situation in Bangladesh.

The National Curriculum Textbook Board (NCTB) is trying to develop well-designed textbook material; though there is lack of pragmatic pedagogy to develop all four skills to achieve competency whether it is Bangla or English.In addition, the Bangladeshi people have yet to reach a minimum level of competency, accuracy and fluency in English. Simpson, 2007 (cited in Islam, 2013) has noted that even after years of study at school, very few Bengalis can speak English fluently, unless they have spent considerable time abroad. Outside of Dhaka, it is impossible for a foreigner to communicate with a Bangla speaker and all road signs are in Bangla except those on a few major roads.To address this issue, native and foreign languages should be given equal importance along with their roots, cultures and histories.Individuals that are competent and have well-developed skills in their native language should have better knowledge of linguistic structures and meta-linguistic processes. This knowledge should enable them to easily internalise the linguistic structures of foreign languages.

Third, another means of developing awareness concerning both native and target language culture is study of comparative literature of both the language. The scope for the comparative study of language and translation should be explored in Bangladesh. The comparative study of languages makes people linguistically aware and culturally sensitive to other languages. The comprehensive ability of both

languageswould develop teaching and learning strategies of both languages that would eventually directttowards competenceof different languages. The study of linguistic structures reveals the history and treasure of languages. The in-depth study of a language's syntax, semantics and discourse should help young researchers to become interested in the study of native and foreign languages. Young Bangladeshi writers are trying to find a place in English literature. Young people should also be encouraged to study translation and creative writing. As Bernacka (2012) stated:

The translation process can be viewed as a way of introducing linguistic as well as cultural equality by enabling Xhosa, Zulu, or Koro, to become languages utilised and promoted through education, working towards formal protection by the respective state constitutions and curricula. Translation can also have a critical influence in politics and can act as an agent for reconciliation or social integration.

The linguistic departments of universities and different language institutions in Bangladesh should adopt extensive measures to encourage young students and researchers to be more actively involved in comparative and translation studies.

Fourth, one of the best ways to introduce the younger generation to native language literaturewould be assurance of exposureto native literature. If the younger generation are familiar with their own literature, they will be interested in studying language and cultureof their own. Further, Bangla literature is not only affluent in its resources but also contains a glorious history and refined culture. Due to a lack of recognition and encouragement to contribute to the native literature, young people are losing interest in Bangla literature. Greater awareness is needed to inspire people to contributeon their own literature and culture.

Finally, the media has a vital role in raising awareness as it does in campaigning for other social issues. In Bangladesh, the media has a strong grip over the sentiment of the people; thus, it could play a crucial role in raising awareness of the form, function and role of both native and foreign languages. The government could enact legislation on the use of language in the media that is directed towards a goal of language awareness.

V. CONCLUSION

Both Bangla and English have their own linguistic attributions that reflect the cultures and emotions of their speakers. Due to globalisation, new pedagogy that would ensure native languages to be splendid in their own grandeur should be adopted for teaching and learning a foreign language. Furthermore, these strategies and methods should also reflect proper language planning and policies. Bangladesh needs a nation-wide awareness programme, a decision from the government, contributions from educators, linguists and writers and the active involvement of the media. A bilingual education policy, language planning and policies, translation studies, comparative studies of language and constructive research based on the study of language could increase language awareness. Teachers, educators, linguists, writers, policy makers and the general population need to

have language awareness.

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